

Jewish Mysticism

(for D. Miller's Comparative Mysticism E+W)

- Hard to come in in medias res
- Hard to ~~sum~~ summarize whole mystical trad more than 2000 years in one lecture. Not able to give complete analysis of all major trends [for that Scholen] but give some taste.

[Mishna]

2 categories "Creation" & "Chanot" — basis for both
Rat. Phil spec. in MA — Maimonides: Physics and
Metaphysics and Kabbala (lit. + trad)

Differences in approaches of 2 subjects:

Phil: certain things we know about God: \exists ;
one; non-material

human language, though, not adequate to express
reality of God. Cannot say "God knows" — knowledge
human characteristic. P is used via negativa
i.e. "God is not ignorant. This could not satisfy
some who wished to know more about God —
mystics/Kabbalists.

K's agreed that God + creation essentially beyond grasp of unaided ^{human} intellect. But can be grasped thru Divine illumination.

- Enduring theme in MA: K or P / Both considered selves esoteric disciplines. Not for all oral Torah from Sinai.

Problem for J. mystics as with all mystics: How to know the unknowable God.

First major mystical movement — ^{Time of Tannaim} Merkava (Throne) EI → Bab.

- Did not aspire to knowledge of true nature of God but to perception of God's Throne [Ezek. 1; Book of Enoch 14] [M. Hagigah 2:1] [Jacobs 22-3]

- How do you get from here to there?

Hekhalot (Palaces) lit — detailed descriptions of descents through various heavens to vision of Throne. — techniques used to achieve this feat.

The end goal, of course, was vision of One who sits on throne — Shi'ur Komah — (measure of Body) — Anthropomorphism in Judaism.

Does God have a body? Lit of Shi'ur Komah

does not ascribe its ^{cosmic} measurements e.g. 2,360,000 leagues to God himself but to God's Kavod "glory"

which differs from God's essence which is still beyond knowledge.

That in brief their treatment of Merkava. What of Bereshit. Mysteries of Creation — Sefer Yezira 3-6 cent E.I. Discourse on cosmology & cosmogony in mystical terms. [Gen 1,1] does not tell how creation occurred. S. Yezira → God created world thru 32 secret paths of wisdom 10 sefirot (numbers orig?)

and 22 letters Heb. alphabet. Knowledge of letters and their combinations--process of Creation itself.

Babylon--Italy via Abu Aaron, said to have performed wonders using God's name (combination of letters). Abu Aaron-R, Moses b. Kalonymous in Lucca--to Germany (Hasidei Ashkenaz) Mystical works ^(beside Ethical) of Hasidei Ashkenaz: Gematria; prophecy; anthropomorphic statements in Bible attributed to Kavod

Ashkenaz to Provence, where Kabbala in strict sense really begins. Provence 12-13c. place of ferment. Catharism; meeting place of Ashkenaz and Sefarad. New horizons for European Jewry.

Sefer ha-Bahir appears in Provence 1150-1200. Not original to area. Probably came from Germany or from East, It purports to be ancient Midrash (like Zohar later) ^{Why speak in name of ancient rabbis and not} not yet Kabbala, but ^{own??} differs from Sefer Yezira in doctrine of Sefirot. Problem: how to bridge the gap between a transcendent God and the

material world? Appropriated neo-Platonic solution of emanation. Sefirot (remember from S. Yezira?) now emanations from God. 10 in number. ^{Are they essence or attribute?} Also gnostic trend is evident in this. Rel. w. Cathari? No solid evidence. But in same place and time.

Kabbala at this point is province of few. Esoteric doctrine & wanted to keep it that way.

Provence --N. Spain, especially to Gerona, near Barcelona--near to Provence. It is here that K begins to enter into the public domain ever so hesitantly through Nahmanides who used his very popular commentary on the Pentateuch as a vehicle for the dissemination of K ideas (Torah as names of God). He wielded great spiritual influence in 13c and on and prepared ground for acceptance of K in X. Spain.

2 things to understand about K. Unlike w. P.--never real conflict bet. K and Torah at least on surface. This because K accepted tradition of Torah and offered new rationales for the performance of the Commandments of the Torah. (expressing mysteries of God and creation) ^{But new Torah is underground} 1) P perceived of as at best neutral on the commandments--while some P's perceived of as anti-tradition. But attempts many to combine the 2 Isaac ibn Latif--P reaches back of Divine--only K reaches face.
2) K as esoteric vs. K for the masses--always conflict and tension between the two.

13 century K took 2 directions: Prophetic K (Abulafia) and theosophical (Zohar).

Abulafia--letter and number combination--cf. Ashkenaz--
Prophecy and Kabb.--Messianism. Not opposed to K of Sefirot--
merely thought that it was useful beginning & no more.
Then contemplation of the Names takes over.--Prophecy.

Zohar--central work in K lit. Midrash in form of Tanna R.
Simeon b. Yohai. Modern study of Zohar indicates clearly
late 13 c. comp. Messiah to come in 1300. Influence of
Maimonides, Nahmanides etc. Published in 1290's by K
R. Moses of Leon Isaac of Acre asked Mrs de Leon of
authorship. Nonetheless, taken as ancient source by
next century and so considered.

14-15c. K's spread and consolidation from Spain to Italy,
Germany & East. Still minority elitist movement.

Then 1492 Expulsion. Physical Crisis; Spiritual crisis--
discrediting of P. Perceived (though not whole truth) that
P was detrimental to J. loyalty in crisis and K good.
What happened to K in 16th c. It went public, became a
mass-movement and it happened because K and Messianism joined
forces.

Messianism--End of Days. Way out of Jewish predicament in
Exile. Refugees from Spain felt it would be very soon.
Abarbanel 1503; Halevi 1530. Apocalyptic expectations make sense
of sufferings of Expulsion.

M integral part of J. ?Not integral part of K? At first no. Early K concentrated not on End of Days but on beginnings-- Creation process. Goal to retrace steps of emanation and arrive at the source through mystical meditation. In aftermath of Expulsion, however, new emphasis on M., and since popular J. imagination on End, easier to popularize it.

Safed in 16c. Centre of creative force within K. Moses Cordovero, Pardes Rimmonim. Summa of K; K in P garb. From our perspective, more important is work of Cordovero's students, who popularized the abstruse doctrines of Cordovero by applying them to practical ethics. K principles in books like Eliezer Azkiri's S. Haredim and Elijah de Vidas' Reshit Hokhma, brought K to masses and informed the observance of the commandments of the Torah w. cosmic import. le-shem yihud etc.

But real rev. in K came not from Cordovero, who was an expositor of the old K, but from Isaac Luria (Ari) (1534-1572) Forged new system which after Zohar greatest influence on K.

New myth of creation which spoke directly to the situation of the Jews in Exile. In beginning was only God. To create universe, God had to contract into self to create space for creation. Zimzum--Emanation of Light--Breaking of the Vessels--sparks mixed with Kelipot--chaos. Nothing is where it should rightly be. i.e. Universe in Exile. God in exile from Shekhina; Paradigm of Israel's exile among nations.

What is needed is repair--Tikkun. Almost achieved in Adam before sin and in Israel at Sinai before Golden Calf and breaking of tablets. Tikkun involves separation of sparks of holiness from Kelipot; union of God and Shekhina; salvation of Israel from exile. Tikkun results in Messiah.

Tikkun * observance of the commandments of the Torah with the right intention--Kavvana. Each Jew as he performs commandments is aiding the Tikkun and helping in bringing of messiah. Powerful image, esp. when popularized.

It took approximately a generation for this Lurianic teaching to spread throughout the J. world, for Luria himself apparently wrote very little. What we have of his system comes from his disciples esp. R. Hayyim Vital who at first tried to keep these teachings secret and who caused the creation of the legend of the Ari. Shivhei ha-Ari Ari as M.b.E.

By about 1600, Lurianic K spread throughout J. world from Iran to Amsterdam. Fulfilled a deep psychological need in J's. Not everyone understood it (cf. Einstein's relativity) but all acknowledged importance.

K. had indeed gone public in a big way; part of every reasonably educated J's education and part of the common universe of discourse of practically all J's. Still some opponents of K but few and far between.

Lurianic K--M tension. Why?--Sabbatai Zvi, of critical importance in J. hist.

What happened. Pervasiveness of Lurianic theory of Mess.
Tikkun which was conceived of as not faroff but almost
completed--M. tension which exploded when SZ came on scene
and claimed to be M. unlike all other medieval mess. movements
which were localized and opposed by J. Comm. leadership--
this was universal and cut across class-lines.

SZ and Nathan of Gaza--conversion--post conversion--
abrogation of present Torah. Ma'asim Zarim of SZ.
Donmeh; Frankists .

In aftermath of SZ some K's remained same--others de-emphasized
M. tension in K. (not M idea though) these were Hasidim of
18 c. Podolia. ^{office of Rebbe} But in SZ, ^{some} ~~idea~~ of K was discredited in
popular mind and especially after 18c. K declined to become today
ironically what it was before 1492--province of elite.